

4.21.07 - Rep. Rahall Asks Air Force to Incorporate Coal-To-Liquid Fuels into Modernization Plan

WASHINGTON, DC - As part of his ongoing efforts to improve national security by promoting the use of coal-to-liquid technology within the U.S. Armed Forces, Rep. Nick Rahall, D-WV, in a letter to the Secretary of the Air Force, is encouraging the branch to incorporate these fuels in its overall fleet modernization plans that will begin in the coming year. Rahall has pledged to work together with the Air Force on this important initiative.

"I applaud the Air Force for its efforts to modernize the B-52 bomber and the role that coal-based synfuels are playing in those efforts," Rahall said. "The Air Force is clearly leading the way in this forward-thinking initiative, and I hope they will continue testing synfuels as they update their fleets."

The modernization plan is necessary in the face of the branch's aging fleet. According to the Air Force, out of an inventory of approximately 6,000 aircraft, a significant number currently operate under flight restrictions. Many transport aircraft and aerial refueling tankers are more than 40 years old. The average age of the bomber force exceeds 30 years, and the fighter force is the oldest it has ever been at an average age of more than 18 years.

"The Air Force is in a position to blaze a bold trail in our efforts to reduce our dependence on foreign oils and pave a new path in America's energy future," Rahall said.

At 93 percent of total government consumption, the U.S. Defense Department is the U.S. government's largest user of fuels, according to the Defense Energy Support Center. Of all four branches, the Air Force consumes the most, at 52 percent, or 2.5 billion gallons annually.

The Air Force has already been searching for ways to reduce its consumption of oil through coal liquefaction. The coal-to-liquid technology Rahall has promoted, particularly for use in the Air Force fleet, creates a type of clean-burning, high-performing synthetic fuel through various conversion processes, which involve gasifying and liquefying coal for use in existing engines.

Rahall was recently a featured speaker at the inaugural U.S. Air Force Energy Forum, at which he announced his participation in a conference this summer in southern West Virginia. The event will serve to boost the development of state-of-the-art CTL production plants with the newly formed national CTL coalition and the Defense Department, in particular the U.S. Air Force.

"Your leadership on this issue will be important in the 110th Congress as several bills addressing technology and new industry are debated," said William Anderson, Assistant Secretary of Installations, Environment and Logistics, in a letter thanking Rahall for his participation at recent Air Force Energy Forum.

"I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to sit with you and talk about the energy initiatives underway at the Air Force and our mutual interest in developing coal to liquid technology. This is one of Secretary Wynne's top objectives as we work to

certify the entire Air Force fleet by 2010," Anderson continued.

"The Air Force has recognized that coal can be one of the strongest weapons in its arsenal for avoiding wars of the future. Wind turbines, solar power, biofuels - none of them hold the potential for ensuring the continued strength of America's military like coal," Rahall said.

"Clearly, coal really is America's most promising fuel of the future - and the more we invest in it, the greater an energy asset this natural resource will prove to be," Rahall continued. "I look forward to working with the Air Force on this vital initiative."

Rahall, along with Rep. Geoff Davis (R-KY), has introduced legislation in Congress, H.R. 370, the Coal-to-Liquid Fuel Promotion Act of 2007 that would provide funding authority to support the exciting work of the Air Force as it continues to test coal-derived fuels in its aircraft. Senators Barack Obama and Jim Bunning have introduced the same bill in the Senate.

The legislation also provides for loan guarantees to help spur private investment in the development of coal-to-liquid production plants. It would give authorities to the Secretary of Energy to promote more research and to help provide for pipelines, storage, and other necessary infrastructure for this emerging industry.

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